REMARKS BY MR. NORTHCUTT ELY TO THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT
OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
JUNE 14, 1946

It is a pleasure to be here with this group again. Sixteen years ago, when we were working together on the water and power contracts, preceeding the construction of Boulder Dam and the construction of your Aqueduct, you may recall, we were plagued by the fact that the United States was to rely on the Metropolitan Water District as its large power contractor, 36 per cent of the firm energy, and that this project must have a reasonably secure water right since your power was limited to pumping into and in your Aqueduct, and in turn, right or not, the Interior Department felt that the whole security of the Boulder Dam set up depended on the adequacy of your water supply to support the population to consume that energy.

The Metropolitan Aqueduct at that time simply existed on paper and in the minds and courage of members of this Board. It was the keystone of the Boulder Canyon Project.

At that time, you may recall, this District and the agricultural interests were in the process of reaching an accord on the division of California's share of the waters of the Colorado River, whatever that quantity might be, undetermined then and undetermined now. You reached an accord with the agricultural interests under which the existing priorities

of the agricultural users were recognized to the extent of 3,850,000 acre feet. The District became entitled to the next 1,100,000 acre feet. It so happens, under the terms of the California Limitation Act, imposed by Congress in the Boulder Canyon Project Act and exacted as one of the conditions of the construction of the Dam, California limited herself to 4,400,000 acre feet of the water allocated to the Lower Basin by Article 3A of the Compact, plus one half of the surplus. Five hundred fifty thousand acre feet came within the 3A water and the balance of your allocation fell in the class above that limitation. It was uncertain then and uncertain now, whether your second 550,000 acre feet was to be considered in part as a claim apportioned or made available by 3B of the Compact or whether you are depending entirely on surplus water for the second 550,000 acre feet.

At that time the water estimates, based on the aggregate record from 1887-1930 indicated with a considerable degree of safety that the surplus was of the magnitude of 2,000,000 to 4,000,000 acre feet. Consequently contracts with California interests, including yourselves, aggregating 5,362,000 acre feet, roughly 1,000,000 more than allocated under 3A, seemed to be a reasonable safe gamble. The surplus would be at least 2,000,000 and probably as high as 4,000,000.

The ink was scarcely dry on the contract with this District and with Imperial Irrigation District and others when the Colorado River Basin began to experience the worst drouth of its history. The period 1931 to 1940 indicated

a low water flow establishing a new limitation on the estimate of the available water supply. At the same time that the estimate on the supply side was actively going downhill, the estimate on the demand side was increasing. In 1922 when the Colorado River Compact was made no one seriously spoke of this Aqueduct of yours which is now a reality. Trans-mountain diversions from the Colorado into the Basins of the Missouri and the Rio Grande were thought would be of the order of 300,000 to 500,000 acre feet. Today there are active investigations and probably favorable reports on trans-mountain diversions aggregating between 2,000,000 and 3,000,000 acre feet.

At that time the prospect of bringing water into Central Arizona by an aqueduct piercing the mountains was a fantasy held only by George Coulter and Fred Maxwell, and received very scant consideration from engineers dealing with the Colorado River. Today the Reclamation Bureau is completing a full scale report on that project with indications that the report will be favorable, involving an estimated cost of a billion dollars. The prospect of that project being built to rescue the Central Arizona area, just as this aqueduct was designed for your future, is a distinct possibility and indeed a probability. At that time, 1930, the Arizona areas were not really as dry as they are now. The reservoirs of the Salt River, while true they did not spill, had an adequate supply. By 1940 the reservoirs of the Salt River system, having an aggregate capacity of

2,000,000 acre feet, held 17,000. They were dry. The fish were rotting. By 1941, in the Spring, providence had filled those reservoirs. In the course of three months they were spilling. That area was saved. Today the Salt River Reservoirs contain under 500,000 acre feet. By this time the crisis of 1940 will be re-enacted and the eminence of an aqueduct for the Central Arizona area will be of the first magnitude.

Now a Mexican Treaty was visualized at some future time in this undertaking. In 1922 and again in 1930 it was sought by something in the way of a guarantee, I use that word advisedly, to allocate 750,000 acre feet. Indeed when I met with you gentlemen, many of you who are members of this Board will recall, Dr. Mead had just concluded his report on negotiations with Mexico in which that Government had declined to go farther than that and had published its report. Nobody ever contemplated Mexico would be allocated twice that figure and would be guaranteed a right taking precedence over the older established users including your own.

Today while we find the estimate of supply has deteriorated, the estimate of demand has increased and the Colorado River is potentially over-sold. I say potentially because the Reclamation Bureau is not only completing a report on the Central Arizona project but is likewise actively preparing for release its comprehensive program on the Colorado River, a program embracing 128 projects for over

20,000,000 acre feet, whereas in the dry decade beginning in 1930 the resources added up to something like 13,000,000 acre feet. In addition there is now pending in Congress a bill reauthorizing the Gila Project of 150,000 acres, 75,000 acres being in a new location, and 75,000 acres on the Yuma-Mesa.

Arizona is actively pushing that project to get it complete and launched before the comprehensive plan is announced, and in my opinion, before the basin becomes aware of the serious overdraft of the water supply. Because, within a short time after that comprehensive report is issued, the race will be on for the authorization of projects to reach the last waterhole first.

Now it has become apparent in Washington, all of you people who have been there and labored effectively will and must have come back with the same realization that I have, namely, that California, despite its wealth, despite its apparent political power of 23 Congressmen, does not exert in Congress a net strength anything like the public conception of California's position. This State unfortunately has been divided, not only on party lines, but on regional lines. It has been a job of the first magnitude to weld together the California delegation into a fighting unit to protect California's water position. Texas' might automatically always votes as one. As a result states in the Colorado River Basin and, in fact some of your own Congressmen find it adverse to vote on issues in which Southern

California's water interests are involved. That arises, in part, from the complacency, I think, of the Southern California area in regarding the construction of Boulder Dam as having assured the future, so far as water is concerned. It isn't a water problem - you turn on the spigot and there it is. Of those who were alarmed about the water situation 25 or 30 years ago, some of them have passed from the picture. Fortunately this Board has a greater continuity in that respect than any other responsible public agency that I know of. The time has come when the work of marshalling the public opinion of Southern California organizations has to be done all over again. We have Congressmen who have been loyal, alert, and interested in this project who have said that when they come back home and start talking about the Colorado River and the Mexican Treaty as often as not the people want to know about the O.P.A. It is difficult to get effective action from Congressmen not hearing from home.

Just to give you in a nutshell the hard ultimate facts, we are up against, the available water from the main stream of the Colorado River, after deducting the first mortgage of the Mexican Treaty, and deducting reservoir losses, and deducting allocations to Nevada, and the quantity New Mexico and Utah already use, then the quantity to be divided between Arizona and California is 6,400,000 acre feet. That figure can be arrived at and supported and cross-checked from any number of angles. That is the figure

to bear in mind. If California gets 5,400,000 acre feet, in round figures - the actual total of contracts is 5,362,000 - there is obviously 1,000,000 acre feet left out of the main stream for Arizona. Arizona already has completed projects or has projects under way to use that flow. It will be absorbed by the Parker Indian, the Yuma Project, and the first unit of the Gila Project. There will be no water at all for the second unit of the Gila Project, and there will be no water at all for Central Arizona or water for the rescue of the civilization that supports Phoenix.

On the other hand, if Arizona were to get 2,800,000 acre feet of the 6,400,000, which is the amount she claims, and which is the amount all existing and potential projects add up to, there would be left for California 3,600,000 acre feet. That is less than California was using before Boulder Dam was built, less than the 3A limitation and a quantity which would leave no water whatever for the Metropolitan Aqueduct.

Bear in mind your priority starts above 3,850,000 acre feet. It is a dilemma from which there is no reasonable escape. The Treaty not only gave more water but gave a priority and a guarantee to be made up from all sources. By reason of a joker the guarantee is of the order of 1,750,000 and not 1,500,000 acre feet.

As to what the solution may be, I don't know if any of us have wisdom enough to say. Surely it is time for

Southern California again to become alert to the necessity of defending your stake in the Colorado River. That job was done very effectively 20 years ago, when this District was under organization, and it has to be done again. California's position must be adequately maintained and supported and protected. I think the time is here when leading citizens of this community should be formed into a Committee again, to educate the community to the problem, and if I may say so, within this Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Water District is not only a nucleus of such a group but also from this source may be obtained the names or recommendations of leaders of the general community you would like to have for associates in the work.

The Texas people have already done this. On every issue between Texas and California on the Colorado River, every Congressman on the Republican side from Northern and Eastern States will receive 20 letters apiece from residents who own land in Texas or who have Texas affiliations. Southern California has friends throughout the United States who may be rallied to understand California's position. The immediate necessity is the creation of a nucleus of a strong Committee.

A. L. Gram